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Puzzling Alliance Emerges as a Sign Of Changing Times

One of the strangest political unions that I can recall existed among—believe it or not—the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Urban League and faculty members from historically black colleges and universities.

These strange bedfellows came together under the National Urban League's Summer Fellowship Program, which began in 1965 and continued until 1981. The program was designed to give faculty and administrators of historically black colleges "a chance to update their knowledge in their specific fields," according to James D. Williams, the league's director of communications.

Initially, it was supported with Ford Foundation funds and later with government moneys. Under the program, academics were assigned to work at private firms and in government agencies. One of the government agencies where some of these academics were placed just happened to be the CIA.

The role of the Urban League in this summer fellowship program was primarily that of a facilitator, according to Williams. A league representative would visit black colleges across the country, promoting the program among faculty and staff members. Once participating agencies and companies viewed the college teachers' resumes, each would select the persons to whom

they would offer summer employment.

By the summer of 1981, however, the Urban League could no longer find funding to continue the program, and so informed the 15 or 20 participating government agencies and private corporations.

But the CIA found the program so beneficial that it decided to fund it on its own, using the same "brand name" that the National Urban League used—the Summer Fellowship Program. During the last four summers alone, 47 faculty members from 30 black colleges have worked at CIA headquarters.

Indeed, the CIA's newest brochure, announcing the 1986 program, makes generous mention of the Urban League-originated program. "The Summer Fellowship Program was initiated by the National Urban League during the sixties," it states in its introduction. "The Central Intelligence Agency initiated the program in coordination with the National Urban League

in 1980 and has operated the program independently since 1982."

No Urban League official in the organization's New York headquarters had seen the brochure, although Williams called the language "tricky" when I read it to him. "It sounds like something that it wasn't," he said. "We never specifically initiated any program with the CIA. [The wording] looks like

they initiated this program with our help, when in fact they initiated their own program after we went out of business" using the structural apparatus the league left behind.

CIA spokeswoman Pattie Volz also allowed as to how the language was "somewhat misleading," but added: "What [faculty and staff from the colleges] get with us is a better understanding of the CIA and perhaps some information of their own to strengthen their own curriculum program. We also use it, quite obviously, as a recruitment tool and a little bit of public relations."

John E. Jacob, the league's executive director, didn't seem overly perturbed that the CIA was using the league's name to lend credibility to its recruitment efforts. "What they said is not untrue," Jacob said. "They did participate with us, but they did not initiate any program with us. Though the program's origin predates [my tenure as league president], I don't think we can deny they were part of it . . . I'm not able to make judgments in a 1985 climate about what led to that decision as to what we did in 1970."

Of course, the irony is that the social revolution of the sixties and seventies that had its seeds in the civil rights movement practically began on America's black campuses, and civil rights leaders such as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. were constantly being investigated by the FBI, the CIA's sister organization. At the same time, the FBI infiltrated and destabilized several civil rights and black militant organizations.

It may be troubling that a program created and initiated by a civil rights organization is now being taken over by a spy agency—for who knows what purposes. But it's also interesting that the Urban League has not yet bothered to

tell the CIA to stop poaching on the credibility it has taken 75 years to build. Jacob's point that we are living in a very different time than just 15 short years ago is entirely appropriate. As the old Cole Porter song says, "Anything Goes!"

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